

Black audience on hand

GOP candidates disagree on firing of Shelby Lanier

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The Republican candidates for county judge and mayor last night took differing stands in the controversy involving the firing of city police officer Shelby Lanier.

Mitch McConnell, candidate for county judge, pressed to take a stand on the issue by a predominantly black audience in western Louisville, said that based on news accounts, he agreed with the firing of Lanier.

Russ Maple, mayoral candidate, expressed support for Lanier and repeated earlier statements that he thought the firing was unfairly severe.

The candidates made the comments before board members of the Park DuValle Neighborhood Health Center. A spokesman for the program said that Democratic candidates Todd Hollenbach, incumbent candidate for county judge, and William Stansbury, candidate for mayor, also were invited but failed to attend.

McConnell appeared reluctant to take a stand on the Lanier firing, explaining that he preferred to leave the matter up to proper city authorities.

"But if forced to make a decision based on the newspaper accounts I've read, I think the safety director did the right thing," McConnell said.

Lanier, who attended the meeting and questioned McConnell on the firing and other matters, was dismissed July 15 on charges that he violated departmental rules concerning political activity while on duty. The case is on appeal to the Civil Service Board.

Lanier is president of the Louisville Black Police Officers Organization.

Maple, expressing support for Lanier, cited cases in which he said other city policemen have faced more serious charges than Lanier, but were permitted to remain on the force.

One, he said, involved a policeman who fired a shot through a window and wounded a woman. In another case, a policeman was charged with molesting a female.

Maple said he would support any employee, white or black, whom he felt had been treated unfairly by superiors.

"I'm not condoning a new set of rules for Shelby Lanier," Maple said.

Lanier told McConnell that it was "unfortunate" that he (McConnell) had to depend on news accounts to make a decision in the case. Lanier charged that city Safety Director Allen Bryan has made "very unethical, very unfair" public statements about charges involved in the case. Lanier criticized Bryan for "trying the case" in the newspaper.

In an interview, Lanier said that he has refrained from making public statements about the case itself. He declined comment on the candidates' statements about his case.

On another matter, Lanier pressed McConnell on whether he would spend county funds in an effort to reverse the court-ordered busing decision for Louisville and Jefferson County if he were elected.

McConnell said that he is opposed to busing, but that he thought it a waste of public funds to attempt to overturn the federal order requiring busing.

In response to a question from another person in the audience concerning abortion, McConnell said that he opposed abortion on moral grounds and that he would oppose spending public funds to subsidize abortions for the poor.

In an interview, McConnell said he did not realize that he was discussing the firing matter with Lanier himself, but said it would not have changed his mind if he had known.

"I don't think I told them what they wanted to hear," McConnell said.

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